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Public Health column for IR

January 2012

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## Overcoming Barriers To Physical Activity

Almost three weeks have passed since your New Year's resolution to increase your physical activity. Given the many health benefits you stand to gain, I hope your resolve is holding strong!

But chances are, you're starting to struggle. If it's any comfort, you're not alone. Research shows that about 80 percent of those who make New Year's resolutions fall off the wagon by Valentine's Day. Research also shows that you're more likely to achieve your goal if you treat these lapses as temporary setbacks.

We all know that physical activity is important for our health and that a lack of it can lead to a whole host of health issues, like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. The community pays, too, through higher health-care costs. And yet, according to the health department's 2011 Community Health Report, 20 percent of us don't participate in any physical activity outside of our regular job.

Sticking to a regular exercise schedule isn't easy, and coming up with excuses *not* to exercise is *so* easy: I don't have time. I'm too tired. I can't afford a health club. It's too cold out. Any of these sound familiar?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have grouped these barriers into seven categories. Here they are, along with practical tips for overcoming them:

### Lack of Time

- Choose an activity that doesn't require you to drive somewhere or change clothing, like walking or stair-climbing.
- Break your activity into smaller spurts. The CDC recommends that adults get at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week. Ten minutes a few times a day (walking, housecleaning, working in the yard, etc.) can be just as effective as a 30-minute workout.
- Be creative at sneaking movement into your day: Park a few blocks away and walk to the office or store. Use stairs instead of the elevator. Choose the snow shovel instead of the snow blower. (One colleague dances along while watching "Dancing with the Stars.")

### Lack of Energy

- Pace yourself. Start small and build up to more intense workouts when your body has adjusted.

- Schedule your activity for times of the day and week when you feel the most energetic. Everyone's body clock is different.
- Remember that regular physical activity will boost your energy level. Give it a chance!

### **Lack of Willpower**

- Choose activities you enjoy. Anything that gets you moving counts.
- Plan a series of small, realistic goals, and reward yourself as you meet them.
- Physical activity can improve your mood, so give it a chance!

### **Lack of Skill**

- Choose activities that don't require you to learn a new skill.
- Take a class to develop new skills.
- Remember that physical activity is not a competitive sport! Focus on your own improvements, not the efforts of others.

### **Lack of Resources**

- Choose activities that don't require special facilities or equipment (walking, stair-climbing, jumping rope, calisthenics, working in the yard, weight lifting with household items).
- Check out exercise videos from the library.
- See if your employer offers financial assistance. Some will pay all or part of a health club membership as an incentive to help lower health insurance costs.

### **Fear of Injury**

- Don't overdo it. Start with something simple and add new activities as your confidence grows.
- Learn to warm up and cool down before and after your fitness routine.
- Be assured that, in most cases, regular, moderate exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness and increase flexibility and endurance, according to the Arthritis Foundation.

### **Social Influences**

- Ask friends and family to respect and support your efforts to get fit. Maybe they'll join you!
- Use time spent waiting at kids' activities productively. For example, walk laps around the mall while you wait for teen shoppers.
- Join the kids in their activities rather than watching from a chair.
- Find a physical activity buddy or join a group.
- Plan social activities that include exercise, like square dancing or volleyball.

Although the CDC didn't include weather among its barriers to physical activity, we Montanans know it can often be a factor. So here's one last batch of ideas for making physical activity a part of your routine, even when it's cold and icy outside:

### **Weather**

- Switch to indoor activities (stationary bicycling, rope skipping, mall walking, stair climbing, indoor swimming).
- Walk the halls and climb the stairs of your office building.
- Walk, jog, or dance in place to your favorite aerobic music.
- Walk around the house while you're on the phone.

For more strategies, visit the CDC website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/getactive/barriers.html>

The CDC also has a quiz you can take to determine your biggest obstacle:

[http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/life/barriers\\_quiz.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/life/barriers_quiz.pdf)

2011 Community Health Report: [www.lewisandclarkhealth.org](http://www.lewisandclarkhealth.org)